Witness says Pinder got bad rap, didn't kill ranch hands

Nearly five years after the murder of John Pinder's two ranch hands, career criminal Jose "Joey" Silva took the stand in 4th District Court on Tuesday, Nov. 19 to testify that Pinder may not have been responsible for the murders.

Silva, who is currently a state inmate, testified that Pinder's alleged accomplice in the brutal murders, Filomeno Valenchia-Ruiz, confided to him that Pinder was not responsible for the October 1998 killing of Rex Tanner and June Flood, but that "another white man" helped him. According to Silva, that man is David Brunyer, another Pinder ranch hand who testified against his boss as the mastermind behind the Oct. 25, 1998 double murders that occurred on Pinders' JJNP Ranch in Duchesne County.

Silva claimed he spoke often with Ruiz in early 1999 while both were being held in the Duchesne County Jail. Silva said he knew that Ruiz was being held for murder at the time and claimed that the two had several conversations where Ruiz allegedly told him that Pinder was not involved in the actual killing, but was involved in the disposal of the bodies.

According to Silva, Ruiz admitted he was the one who shot Tanner and Flood because they had stolen a half-pound of methamphetamine from him. Silva said that Ruiz, a Mexican national and Pinder's right-hand man at his expansive Duchesne County ranch, even said he "kind of felt bad" for implicating his boss.

During the 2000 jury trial in which Pinder was found guilty of both murders, prosecutors maintained that Pinder, already suffering from a paranoia-induced meth problem, was the one who master-minded the murders of Tanner and Flood. Detectives said that Ruiz and Pinder took the couple to a remote are in Duchesne County where they shot the victims execution-style, and then used explosives to get rid of the bodies. Brunyer's sisters testified earlier that their brother also had a penchant for explosives.

Ruiz had testified under oath that Pinder was present during the murders at the time of Pinder's trial. It was this testimony that helped sway the jury to convict Pinder on two counts of murder. Pinder was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences, but has had the conviction on appeal for the past two years. He remains incarcerated pending the outcome of his appeal.

During questioning by defense attorney Andrew Parnes, Silva said he was highly concerned about his safety, fearing someone in the Mexican Mafia would kill him for testifying. Parnes had kept Silva's identity a secret since he came forward with the information.

The prosecution worked to prove Silva's testimony false, that he was a manipulative convict willing to lie to benefit himself.

Wims also focused on Silva's long criminal history, including attempted burglary, attempted drug distribution, and trying to escape from the Davis County Jail.

The hearing will be continued to Dec. 16 when Pinder's former attorney, Ron Yengich will testify.

Stringham found guilty in two jury trials

Kyle Stringham, 42, of Roosevelt, was convicted two times last week in two separate jury trials after being arrested on Nov. 7, 2001.

Tuesday, Nov. 19, an 8th District Court jury deliberated for only 17 minutes before finding Stringham guilty of distribution of first-degree felony methamphetamine. In a second trial on Thursday, Nov. 21, after deliberating for 30 minutes, juror found him guilty of first-degree felony distribution of cocaine.

Stringham was arrested after selling the drugs to a confidential informant working with the Uintah Basin Narcotics Strike Force, said Strike Force member Brad Draper.

The informant bought two grams of methamphetamine from Stringham. Stringham then told the informant that he had cocaine he would sell. The informant told him that she would be back later in the afternoon to buy the cocaine.

She went back and bought an "eight ball" of cocaine from him, and after she left, Agent Draper stopped Stringham's car in Cedarview and found him in violation of his parole with 20 grams of cocaine and methamphetamine in his possession, along with $1159.

Stringham will be sentenced on both convictions and is currently in the Utah State Prison, serving a sentence on other drug-related convictions.

The Strike Force is pleased to get Stringham off the street, said Draper. "He has a 20- year drug history and the Strike Force has been diligent in getting first-degree felony conviction on people who are repeat offenders. If you are a repeat offender, you will be charged with a first-degree felony, which carries a prison term of five years to life," stated Draper.

Traffic stops results in drug charge

Miles Walker, 46, Vernal, was incarcerated in the Uintah County Jail for driving under the influence of drugs, possession of methamphetamine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia. Bail was set in the amount of $10,925.

Uintah County Sheriff's Department, Sgt. Keith Campbell conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle and found the driver to be confused and disoriented. K-9 deputy Bevan Watkins conducted field sobriety tests on the driver and found him to be impaired and unable to safely operate a motor vehicle, which was confirmed by Deputy Leonard Issacson, a Drug Recognition Expert, after an exam on the subject..

The driver was questioned about his drug use and admitted that he had consumed and had drugs at his residence. The Uintah County Sheriff's Office drove the subject to his home and recovered drug paraphernalia, marijuana and suspected methamphetamine.

Terminated Utes file new suit against federal government

Uintah Basin residents who say they lost their special status as a Native Americans when the federal government illegally terminated the "mixed blood" members of the Uinta Band of the Ute Indian Tribe, are once again raising the issue in federal court.

The civil rights lawsuit was filed Nov. 4, in Washington, D.C. on behalf of plaintiffs Oranna Felter, Fort Duchesne; Calvin Hackford, Whiterocks; Alvin Denver, Roosevelt; Jens Christensen, Lapoint and others.

The suit seeks the reinstatement of their rights as Uinta Band members and asks for a judgement against the United States of over $3 million for each plaintiff.

Their argument is not new to the courts. Disagreements surrounding whether the government acted correctly in removing 490 members — mainly members of the Uinta Band — from the federal rolls in 1954 through the Ute Partition Act, has been the reason for numerous court filings over the years.

The 38-page suit maintains the federal government and leadership of the Ute Indian Tribe combined to deprive the plaintiffs "of their right to fully participate in the tribal governance of the 'Uinta Band' and to benefit from their unbroken 'special relationship' with the United States."

The plaintiffs further claim the actions of the defendants forced the removal of the terminated Utes from their "historical and spiritual homelands in favor of Ute Bands from Colorado possessing no historical or contemporary moral of legal claim to the Uinta and Ouray Reservation."

Defendants in the case are U.S. Secretary of Interior Gale Norton, U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs Neal McCaleb, and Southwestern Regional BIA Director Ralph Nordwall.

Roosevelt Police

Drivers and passengers will be cited if not buckled up

The Roosevelt Police would like everyone to have a happy Thanksgiving and Christmas this year. That is why they are going to be out in force checking on drivers to make sure they are buckled up, and are keeping to the speed limits.

According to Roosevelt Assistant Police Chief J. C. Hansen, officers will be working extra overtime shifts and will focus on those drivers and passengers who don't buckle up..

"We are taking a no-tolerance stand. We have a real problem with juveniles who go to lunch and have four or five people in the front of a truck and none of them have seatbelts on."

Hansen also said passengers who are not wearing seatbelts will receive a seat belt citation. "It is not just the driver that can be cited," said Hansen.

"We want people to enjoy the holidays, and we want to get everyone trought the holidays with no fatal accidents in the Uintah Basin."

Talmage man petitions county to vacate roads on private property

By Angela Eddington

Following a public hearing last week, Duchesne County officials were left to decide over the next few weeks whether or not to vacate several roads in Talmage, near the Steamboat Mountain area.

Fred Tew, a private property owner living in Talmage, petitioned county commissioners to vacate several class D roads that run through his property. There's one road in particular that he strongly asserts should be closed because it was once his private property, illegally taken from him without his knowledge or consent.

On Monday, Nov. 18, Duchesne County Commissioners held a public hearing during their regular meeting to give other residents in the Talmage area an opportunity to explain why or why not they felt the roads should be vacated. Several attended the hearing, most in opposition to Tew's proposal.

Tew spoke first, explaining his request to vacate the roads. "I don't live in a communist country, yet my private property has been taken by my friends," he related.

According to Tew, originally Shell Oil Company asked him for permission to build a road. "We agreed, and they bought the rights for a right-of-way." Then, in 1978, the county claimed the road and many others in the county as theirs, classifying them as D roads, " without me knowing anything about it," said Tew.

Soon after, Realtors bought and subdivided the land past Tew's property, and now the road is used by many as a public road and by others as the only access to their properties. Utility companies also use the road. "We've got 30 or more private landowners there, and this is the only access to their property," declared Wilbur Hammond, a landowner opposed to vacating the roads.

The road runs through the middle of Tew's property, and the public has driven their 4-wheelers and trucks on his land, shot his animals, left garbage, and caused numerous other problems, resulting in "one big headache," he said. Tew built a gate across the road about a year ago to try and stop the problems.

Most of the people who need to get through the gate were given keys, but a few were not because they do not live on their property. Many find it frustrating and even hazardous at times to unlock a gate every time they want to go through it, but others enjoy the security the gate and locks provide.

Commissioners are sympathetic to Tew's problem, but also understand the need for other property owners to have access to their land. An unlocked gate was discussed, as well as building a new road that would go around Tew's property and still provide other property owners and utility companies access to their homes and property, which Tew would prefer.

Most of those currently using the road said building a new road would be costly and unnecessary and would like continued access to the road. Chandra Sorensen, a landowner on Steamboat Mountain, said the fact that the road has been around for over 10 years makes it a public road.

Tew expressed his frustration, "This is the only access they have to their property, and they don't want the road moved. They basically want to have their property rights and don't want me to have mine."

County Commissioners will continue taking written comments and public input until Monday, Dec. 2. The county is not currently leaning one way or the other on this issue, and the final decision will be announced on Dec. 9 during the regular commission meeting, said deputy county attorney Roland Uresk.

NOTICE

To all NON-INDIANS in the Uintah Basin:
If you have been ticketed into Ute Tribal Court for alleged trespass on tribal lands, your rights may have been violated
For more information, call:
Michael L. Humiston
Attorney at Law
435-646-3280

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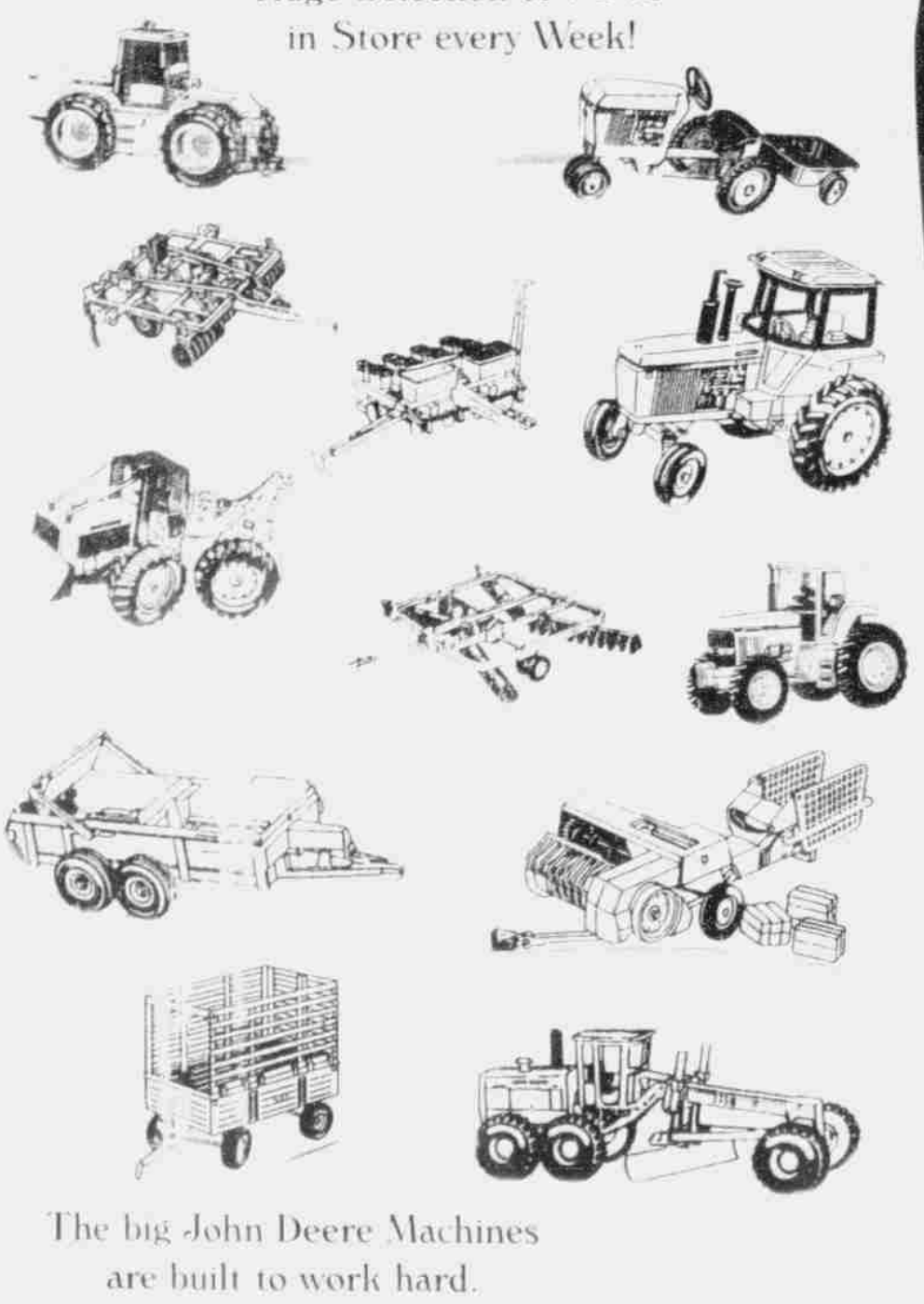

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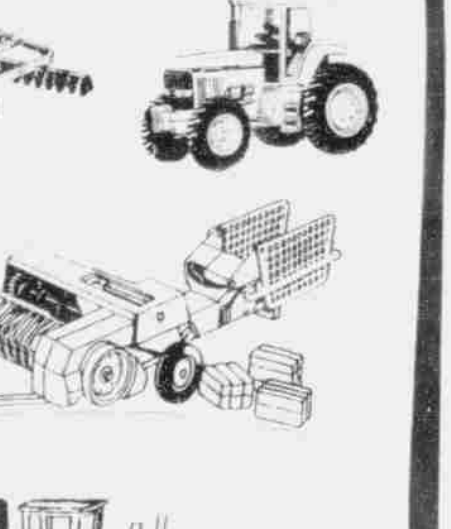

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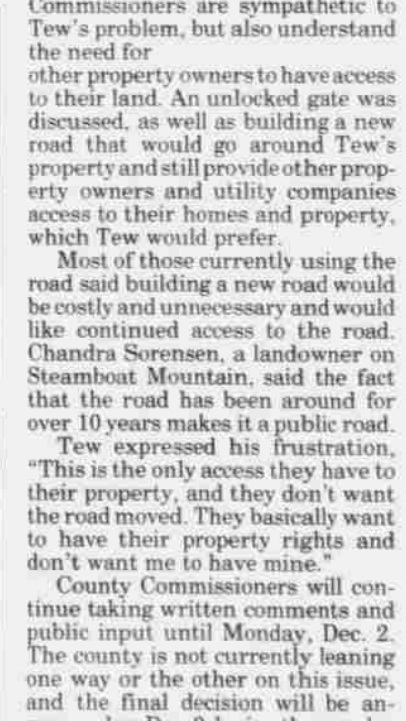

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